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CANADA AND HER ART

BY ERIC BROWN,

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The art of a young nation is a changeling in the home. It is a daughter born to parents absorbed in the achievement of material prosperity, who with all the good will in the world cannot understand and know how to educate those qualities which they see developing in their child so strongly and so differently from their own. So it is that her childhood is neglected and her youth misunderstood and not until the compelling power of womanhood animates her does that misunderstanding yield to admiration and disdain to applause.

It might be said with some truth that it is the first scarce conscious realization of maturity that typifies the development of Canadian art to-day and it is bringing with it such problems as how to develop and foster an appreciation of that art in due ratio to the growth of its production and how to encourage the art itself to develop and expand its ideals along national lines. These are great questions, greater perhaps to those within than to those without, for those within can see that it is largely by means of the arts, esthetics and handicrafts that the tremendous material energy of the country must be refined and a right direction given to its surplus wealth.

Take the crafts, textile and other handicrafts. In addition to the industries preserved among the inhabitants of Quebec, the Scotch and Irish peasants of the eastern provinces and the Indian tribes scattered throughout the Dominion, which are now being encouraged with good result by guilds and societies of wise and far-seeing people, there is a ceaseless flood of immigrants pouring into western Canada every year, bringing their industrial traditions with them. A large proportion of them come from Europe and almost invariably they bring with them some native craft which has been a joy and a profit to their ancestors and their village since time immemorial. Here, in the long winters when the farm work is light, there is leisure and incentive to work at the old craft—the skill they inherit—but where are the materials, the markets and often the designs? These we must provide or these arts and crafts will be quickly lost, and here, again, it is the surplus wealth of the country which needs to be

directed into right channels and educated to see more value, satisfaction and beauty in some article, however humble, which is hallowed by the individual creative thought rather than stamped and standardized by the patterned perfection of the machine. It is a great work and as yet the laborers are few.

So it is or has been with the finer arts. The pioneer in the artistic wilderness needs an even greater heart than his brother in the forest. He has to meet an obliquity and disdain more cruel than the obstinacy of inanimate things or the hardships of climate. In Canada he has met them and in a large measure has conquered them, and, as I have said, the situation is that the artistic production is increasing in leaps and bounds in quality and quantity, and the problem is now to encourage and foster it and provide a market for it by instilling into those who, during its infancy, satisfied their desires with foreign pictures, the fact that there is now an art in their midst, different but not inferior, crying for recognition and that they must put aside foreign standards and ideals and judge it and appreciate it as one of their most valuable possessions. I would insist that the art of a country, and especially of a young country, is its most valuable national asset because it is the expression of all that is most elevating, truthful and permanent in the national achievement. No nation can be truly great until it has a great art, and to revert to an earlier simile, the advantage of the parents' study of the child's character is obviously mutual.

With regard to the history of Canadian art, there is not a great deal to record. The great hearts, pioneered in the wilderness, broke the roads and laid the foundations and all honor is due to them.

About the middle of the nineteenth century, G. T. Berthon came from Vienne, France, to paint portraits in Toronto. His father had been one of the most promising pupils of the great David. Berthon's work included portraits of the most eminent Canadians of his day.

Daniel Fowler came from England in 1843. For fourteen years he farmed in Ontario. For the next thirty he painted in water-color under the influence of the great nineteenth century school of British water-color painters.

Otto R. Jacobi, court painter to the Duke of Nassau at Wiesbaden, came to Canada in 1860 and lived and painted there for the rest of his life.

Paul Kane, pioneer in the forest as in his art, traveled thousands of miles by canoe, horse and snowshoe to obtain his pictures and portraits of Indians and their customs.

Wyatt Eaton was the friend and biographer of Millet, Fraser, O'Brien, Kreighoff, Benoni Irwin and many others whose names are household words in the tale of early Canadian art.

From these individuals was formed, in 1867, the first organization of Canadian painters, called the Society of Canadian Artists. This organization was followed by the Ontario Society of Artists, the oldest living organization of artists in the Dominion. It is now flourishing vigorously under the presidency of Mr. Wyly Grier, R.C.A. It is the art body that introduces the young talent to the world of publicity. It has had a varied career, but of late years its annual exhibitions have witnessed a great revival and the foremost artistic talent of Canada is being largely recruited from its ranks.

Then came the Royal Canadian Academy, founded in 1880, on the traditions of the Royal Academy of England, by the then Marquis of Lorne and H. R. H. Princess Louis during the term of their vice-royalty. It includes in its ranks of academicians and associates, all the foremost artists, sculptors, designers and architects in the Dominion. Its president is Mr. William Brymner, and it is good to note that its annual exhibitions, which best reflect the artistic progress of the country, are of an ever-improving quality. It is very inadequately supported by the government, but notwithstanding it has for the past thirty years done a great and good work in encouraging and stimulating the artistic endeavor of the Dominion which it was wisely created to centralize and express.

Up to the present its annual exhibitions have been held in Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa in turn, with an occasional exhibition in other towns, but the time is coming which will demand its presence in the western provinces. Winnipeg has just opened the first Canadian Municipal Art Gallery with a representative exhibition of Canadian art under the auspices of the Royal Canadian Academy. This will assuredly be followed by the other provinces no less progressive nor unmindful of the needs of their growing population.

Then there is the Canadian Art Club, with headquarters in Toronto, a five-year old secession from the Ontario Society of Artists. Its share in the good work is the specialty it is making of reuniting with Canadians in its exhibitions, the work of those men

who in the earlier days were forced to seek recognition in the United States and in Europe. Homer Watson, R.C.A., is its president, and its annual exhibitions hold many interesting pictures, albeit it seems to be somewhat departing from the ideal of an independent secession which was the reason of its birth.

Canada's art museums and art schools are yet in their infancy, at least in numbers. Monteval has its art association, due entirely to private enterprise. It contains an interesting permanent collection, largely the result of bequests; and the best art school in the country, whose advanced classes are under the direction of Mr. William Brymner, P.R.C.A. To mark its progression and prosperity it has recently moved into a new and most palatial home in the finest section in the city.

Toronto has the Art Museum of Toronto, a magnificent site for which was recently bequeathed by the late Dr. Goldwin Smith. The site is in his old home, The Grange. Plans are being prepared for the new building and there is no reason to doubt that Toronto will shortly have an art center worthy of the greatest English-speaking city in the Dominion.

The Ontario College of Art is also in Toronto, and has recently passed through a much-needed reorganization. Under the presidency of Mr. George Reid, R.C.A., it may be expected to do even better work than in the past towards the training of the young idea.

Winnipeg, as I have mentioned, has just opened the first Municipal Art Gallery in Canada—a step the importance of which can hardly be overestimated. It marks that point of development when the esthetic has become a necessity to the progressive thought, and the surplus wealth will thereby be attracted towards that element of the country's production which is its greatest refining influence.

For the rest of Canada, however, there is little encouragement given to art, and the need is great. There is no lack of talent or appreciation; it is springing up and bearing fruit on all sides where there is the proper soil and cultivation. Given the art schools and art galleries, they will be filled, and it should be the work of each provincial government and each municipality to provide at least some training which may convince the aspirant of his fitness or unfitness to enter the world of artistic production.

And lastly there is the National Art Gallery at Ottawa, the

capital of the Dominion. Founded as the repository of the Royal Canadian Academician's diploma pictures in 1880, it has existed for thirty-two years, but only lived, it might be said, for the last five, when an Advisory Arts Council was appointed by the government to spend its annual grants and to some extent administer its affairs. The president of the Advisory Arts Council is Sir Edmund Walker, C.V.O., LL.D., D.C.L. A director was appointed in 1910 and the National Gallery was granted more spacious though still temporary quarters in the Victoria Memorial Museum, where it now occupies three floors in the east wing, the two lower devoted to a well-arranged and interesting collection of casts and the top floor to one large picture gallery and seven small ones. Here, at least, one may study the rise and progress of Canadian art in its entirety. Every artist of note is represented, and it is the intention of the National Gallery to provide a most complete collection of Canadian art from its earliest days and at the same time the best collection procurable of the world's artistic endeavor.

The five years of systematic government have done much, and there is much more yet to do; but at least it can be said that in addition to the representation of Canadian art the visitor can follow the history of the world's art from the primitive Italians to Caravaggio, the first of the great naturalists, and through the great Dutch and Spanish schools of the seventeenth century to the eighteenth century school of English portrait painters, fathered by Thornhill and Hogarth, and thence to the broken color impressionist who seeks to let the light of his picture shine before men by placing his pure colors side by side instead of mixing them. Hogarth, Reynolds, Gainsborough, Hoppner, Beechey and Lawrence are finely represented by portraits; Millais by his portrait of The Marquis of Lorne, founder of the Royal Canadian Academy; Watts by a replica of his "Time, Death and Judgment;" Holman Hunt by his portrait of Henry Wentworth Monk, Canadian visionary and worker for universal peace; Leighton by a finely painted head; the Barbizon school is represented by both pictures and drawings; the eclectic Italians by a group of drawings from the late Duke of Rutland's collection; Chardin and De Heem by wonderful examples of still life.

The National Gallery has lately acquired a collection of a hundred engravings by the greatest of the French portrait engravers,

Nanteuil—a unique and magnificent representation of the master's genius. To a country upon which the great French statesmen of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries wielded such influence, the collection is invaluable, both from artistic and historical viewpoints.

Boudin is there with a magnificent blue *Vue D'Etaples*; Bauer, the contemporary Dutch painter and etcher, with oil and water color paintings and a representative collection of etchings; and among recent purchases are "The Green Feather," by Laura Knight, which gained distinction at the 1912 international exhibition at the Carnegie Institute at Pittsburgh; a fine marine by Paul Dougherty, and some others.

The future of the National Gallery is the building of a beautiful and permanent home on one of the finest sites of the city in which there will be adequate room for permanent and loan collections, where the national portraits may be fittingly exhibited, and where the visitor to the capital, the inhabitant and the student, who will one day be working in a national or municipal art school nearby, may study in its entirety the progress and power of Canadian art.

It is early to attempt to define the national characteristic of Canadian art. A national spirit is being slowly born, one might perhaps say it walked abroad, but as yet between the lights. There are painters who are finding expression of their thought in the vast prairies of the far West, in the silent spaces of the North, by the side of torrent and tarn, and in the mighty solitudes of the winter woods. The appeal of the great land is every year more manifest, and is being expressed with an indefinable solemnity and deference which is nothing less than the first national utterance of a young art awake to a mighty heritage.

And what of the future? The future of Canadian art is development, advancement and recognition until it can be said that no Canadian painter needs to seek a living in another land; until there is artistic training to be had in every town; and until, greatest of all, the surplus wealth is directed towards supporting and welcoming all artistic endeavor with all the pride of the patriot in a great national achievement.